



NAPT Statement on NTSB Meeting in re Baltimore, Chattanooga

We watched and listened with great interest yesterday (May 22, 2018) as the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) provided valuable insight into the probable causes of two serious school bus crashes and made recommendations to help prevent such incidents in the future.

Even with the best overall safety record in the transportation industry, there is no finish line in the pursuit of school bus safety. As we have done in the past, we will communicate NTSB's recommendations to our members. As a first step, we extended an invitation to NTSB Chairman Sumwalt to attend our national conference this October and speak to our members directly.

We will encourage our members to re-double efforts to provide robust, documented training, screening and oversight of all driver and bus operations, and have procedures in place to monitor their effectiveness and take any necessary action quickly.

We will also encourage our members to consider all available crash avoidance systems and other technology that may help prevent many crashes and mitigate the severity of those that cannot be avoided. School bus manufacturers and aftermarket product suppliers in the school transportation market space already offer these options and the "take rate" for them among school districts and their contract service providers is on the upswing.

We specifically support the installation of Electronic Stability Control (ESC) on school buses. It is proven technology that automatically brakes individual wheels and reduces engine power to help drivers maintain control during skids and keep their vehicles on the road. ESC serves as the building block for many of the other desirable crash avoidance technologies.

For cars and SUVs, ESC has been found to reduce fatal single-vehicle crash risk by 49 percent and fatal multiple-vehicle crash risk by 20 percent, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). Similarly, according to estimates from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) ESC saved 1,362 lives in 2012 alone when it became standard equipment on passenger vehicles sold in the United States. In 2015, NHTSA required ESC to be installed on all new large trucks by 2017 and commercial and inner-city buses by 2018. We were surprised when NHTSA chose to exempt large school buses from this mandate. NTSB is now recommending that NHTSA change its regulatory position to include large school buses, and we strongly support them doing so.

Though the Board concluded that the dynamics of the Chattanooga crash reduced the effectiveness of compartmentalization, it has proven over many decades to be a smart and critically important safety approach in the pupil transportation environment. But it was conceived by NHTSA back in the 1970s. For 15 years NAPT has encouraged NHTSA to consider upgrading the now 40-year old parameters of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety

Standard (FMVSS 222) in light of information gleaned from crash investigations, private sector research and product development advances.

In a letter sent within the week to NTSB Chairman Sumwalt, we pointed to a recent professional article by an NTSB investigator suggesting the timeliness of a fresh look at compartmentalization. We encouraged the Board to make a recommendation on this to NHTSA. Although that has not happened, we will continue to press NHTSA – and encourage NTSB – to reevaluate compartmentalization as a safety engineering design concept.

It was stated at the NTSB meeting yesterday that, “It’s time to jump off the fence” regarding belts. We wholeheartedly agree. If lap/shoulder belts are “tried and true” and provide “the highest level of protection” in school buses, respectfully, why were there no recommendations to NHTSA – the federal agency responsible for regulating them – to provide all of the answers and clarity states and communities need to effectively evaluate belts, among other educational priorities and practices?

We are disappointed NTSB did not call on NHTSA to explain why it will not require belts in all large school buses; correct the agency’s regulatory record from 2008-2010 that sends a conflicting message about the need for belts in school buses; and provide the public and policy makers with an effectiveness number for lap/shoulder belts in large school buses (same as they do for passenger cars), and information about the effect lap/shoulder belts will have on emergency evacuations.

NAPT remains committed to seeking clarity for our members and will continue to collaborate with both NTSB and NHTSA to improve student safety.